Home Care After Arterial Leg Bypass Surgery

These instructions will answer many questions about your care at home after surgery. Everyone's condition is different, so you may not find answers to all of your questions. Please ask your doctor or nurse for more information.

Incision Care:

- You may shower. Gently wash your incisions with soap and water. Rinse well and pat dry. You may use your usual bath soap. Do not take a tub bath until your staples are out and the incisions are healed.
- Your staples will be removed 10 - 14 days after surgery. Paper tapes, called steri strips will be applied to your incisions after the staples are removed. The steri strips will loosen and peel off by themselves. You may remove the strips if they do not come off in about 10 days. You do not need to put the strips back on.
- Check your incision each day for redness, swelling or drainage.
- It is normal for your incisions to be sensitive and tender to touch. You may have burning, tingling and numbness on the inner thigh along the incisions and down the front of the calf. The sensations are due to the healing of the nerves to the skin that are cut at the time of surgery. These feelings are normal and are part of the healing process. They may continue for 6 - 12 months.
- Do not apply any lotions, creams, ointments or powders to your incisions.
- Prior to going home, the nurse will instruct you if you need a bandage to cover your incisions. If you incisions begin to drain at home, cover them with a gauze dressing. Do not put tape on your skin below the knee. Use a gauze wrap to hold the dressing in place and place the tape on the gauze.

Activity:

- Do not drive for 2 weeks or until you are told you may resume driving. Do not drive if you are taking pain medications as this may slow your reaction time. You may ride in a car.
- You may go up and down the stairs.
- Walking is the best form of exercise after surgery. Start out slowly and gradually increase your walking distance until you are able to resume your regular activities. If you are interested in a walking program, ask your doctor for more information.
• Do not lift anything heavier than 5 pounds for the first 2 weeks after you are home. If you have a groin incision, avoid activities that strain that area. Avoid strenuous activities such as riding a bike until after your first follow up visit.

• You will be given instructions at your first follow up visit about when you may return to work.

• You will tire easily after surgery but this will slowly improve each week. Use common sense and rest when you are tired. Try to space your activities throughout the day and allow for rest periods.

Diet:

• Eating adequate amounts of vitamins, minerals and protein will help your incisions heal. You may resume your usual diet unless you were instructed to follow a special diet while in the hospital.

Constipation:

• Some pain medications may cause constipation. If needed, you may take the laxative of your choice. If the laxative does not work, you may use an enema.

Recovery:

It is normal for your appetite, bowel movements, energy level and sleep patterns to be irregular after surgery. These things will gradually return to normal as your body heals. Remember, each person's recovery from surgery is different so don't be discouraged.

It is normal to have swelling in your operative leg. This may increase as you are up more at home, especially if you have incisions below the knee. To help reduce the amount of swelling, try the following:

1. Avoid sitting with your legs down for long periods of time. Keep your leg up when you are sitting in a chair.

2. You may need to elevate your leg so the heel is above the level of your heart for an hour in the morning and again in the afternoon in order to keep the swelling under control.

3. Do not wear support stockings without your doctor's permission
Pain Medications:

- If a refill on your pain medication is needed, please call the office before 12:00 noon to allow time for the refill to be called to the pharmacy the same day. Please have the name of the medication, the dose and the pharmacy telephone number available when you call the office.

- It is the policy of our doctors not to refill routine pain medications on the weekend or holidays.

- Certain types of narcotic pain medications cannot be called in over the telephone and require a written prescription. Please be aware that these prescriptions will need to be picked up at the office or mailed to your home.

What to do for long term success:

- Do not smoke. Smoking causes the arteries to narrow and can prevent blood flow to vital organs. It contributes to "hardening of the arteries". If you need more information on how to quit smoking, please ask your doctor or nurse.

- Control your blood pressure. Please see your medical doctor regularly.

- Control your cholesterol. Eat foods low in saturated fats (animal fats). If you are on a cholesterol lowering medication, take it as prescribed. If needed, a dietitian can speak with you and your family regarding healthy food choices.

- Control your blood sugar. Keeping your blood sugar under control will help reduce your health risks from diabetes. This can affect not only your circulation, but your vision, kidney function and general health.

- Exercise regularly. Begin to exercise on a regular basis. Exercise will help maintain a normal body weight. Walking is the best exercise to help improve blood flow to the legs.

- Protect your feet. Never go bare foot. Wear well fitting shoes. Do not use sharp instruments to remove calluses from your feet. Keep your feet well moisturized with lanolin based lotion each day. Inspect your feet each day for any injuries.

- Keep your regularly scheduled doctors appointments.

Know about your bypass:

- You have a ______________________________ bypass graft.

  Your doctor may call your bypass a "Dacron" graft or "Gortex" graft. These are both artificial bypasses. If you have an artificial bypass, tell your other doctors and dentists. For the next 6 months, you may need antibiotics before procedures that require an incision or surgery.

- You do not have a bypass graft.
When to call your doctor:

Please call your doctor if any of the following occur:

- You develop redness, increased pain, swelling or drainage from your incisions
- You have a temperature of 101 or above
- Your leg suddenly turns pale, painful, cold and numb or if you cannot move your foot or toes.
- Sudden, unusual or severe pain in your leg or abdomen
- You develop an open sore, crack in the skin or black or blue spots on your foot or toes that do not go away.
- Pain or heaviness in your chest or arms
- Shortness of breath
- Any questions or concerns you have once you are at home.

Follow up appointments:

On the day you go home, you will receive more written instructions. A follow up appointment will be included on the form. If this is not a convenient day or time for you, please call the office at (614) 293-8536 to reschedule your visit. Please let us know if you need a map to the office.

If you would like more written information, please call the Library for Health Information at (614)923-3707. You can also make the request by e-mail: health-info@osu.edu.

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Vascular Surgery
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- Upon request all patient education handouts are available in other formats for people with special hearing, vision and language needs, call (614) 293-3191.